

SEC BRIEFING

29 May 1956

CURRENT SITUATION IN JORDAN

1. Over the past few weeks, the situation in Jordan--in terms of US interests--has continued to deteriorate, with the armed forces now legally in the hands of and the government dominated by an ultra-nationalist group of young Arab Legion officers. These developments are bringing Jordan closer to Egypt and will probably further estrange Jordan from Britain. The position of 20 year old King Hussein, despite an increasing tendency on his part to exert his authority, may depend more and more on his willingness to yield to the pressure of the young military leaders, who he has put into power.

2. On 20 May, King Hussein asked for the resignation of the relatively moderate Prime Minister Rifai, who had attempted to resist the spread of Egyptian influence in Jordan. Rifai had not held the King's confidence for some months and had been under attack for failing to end his country's special relations with Britain.

3. The new regime, under Prime Minister al-Mufti, includes former ambassador to Egypt Fawzi al-Hulai as vice-Premier and Minister of Foreign Affairs. According to the Egyptian press, al-Hulai had two meetings with the Soviet Ambassador to Egypt during his last four days in Cairo. The new Minister of Defense and Interior, Major General Ajlani, was reportedly appointed with the approval of the new Arab Legion chief of staff, ultranationalist 33 year old Major General Ali Nuzar, who has risen dramatically in the last three months from a relatively obscure Lt. Colonel to confidant and advisor of the King.

4. One of the new Premier's first acts was to announce his intention to amend the Anglo-Jordanian treaty to "make it more compatible with Jordanian interests. He has also hinted that Britain might be asked to modify its present military base rights. Britain now pays Jordan an annual military subsidy of \$28,180,000.

5. Nuzar and his associates in the Free Officers' Movement (FOM) are now in a position to assert their power and influence openly. Nuzar is consolidating his control of the Arab Legion, with the support of the King. There have been announcements for expansion of the 22,000 man Legion to include part or all of the 21,000 man Jordanian National Guard. The Guard is a paramilitary militia force, badly trained and poorly equipped, and composed largely of Palestine Arabs. It will thus be an inordinate and probably destabilizing influence on the Legion, which has had fine training and high esprit d corps.

6. The Free Officers' Movement, headed by Nuzar, is now reported to include 180 members, 30 of whom form an inner circle. Within the movement, however, a faction is still said to be plotting against Nuzar and the King, with reported plans for a coup in September. This faction, which is anti-Communist, considers Nuzar pro-Egyptian, and is suspicious of Cairo's intentions, reportedly plans terrorist activities against British bases in Jordan, for the purpose of discrediting Nuzar.

7. Nuzar, is reported to favor Jordan's acceptance of Egyptian financial support for the Legion some funds have already been received. Increased funds would be needed to obtain heavy combat equipment for the Legion and to equip the National Guard forces to be brought up to Legion standards. Such Egyptian financial support is said to be conditional upon alteration of Jordan's treaty relations with Britain.

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8. In an apparent effort to consolidate his position, Nuzar has already promoted 11 officers including his reported rivals in the FOD, to brigadier or colonel. In another conciliatory bid, the King apparently has ordered court martial charges dropped against the small group of Legion officers, arrested in April, who attempted to organize opposition to Nuzar. This reprieve may afford Husain the opportunity to use the group as a counter-balance to Nuzar.

25X1 9. [REDACTED] Jordan's new cabinet may shortly dissolve the legislature in preparation for new elections--a course which Nuzar is reported to favor. Under present conditions, such elections would bring Jordan still further under ultranationalist control and strengthen Nuzar's parliamentary support.

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